

## **Testimony**

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**Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection  
Hearing on H.R. 503, a bill to amend the Horse Protection Act**

**Washington, D.C.  
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Chairman Stearns, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Dr. Douglas Corey and I have been an equine veterinarian for the past 30 years in a five-person mixed animal practice located in Walla Walla, Washington. I am here today, not only as a long-time horse owner, but also as the President Elect of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. The AAEP is a professional association, which represents nearly 7,300 equine veterinarians worldwide, many whom are long-time horse owners as well. Our mission is dedicated to the health and welfare of the horse. Our world headquarters are located in Lexington, Kentucky. I have served as the Chair of the AAEP's Equine Welfare Committee and the American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Committee. I currently Chair the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Animal Welfare Committee and serve on the American Horse Council Animal Welfare Committee.

I want to make three main points today:

- First, this bill will negatively impact the health and welfare of horses across the country and offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses.
- Second, horse processing at a U.S.D.A. regulated facility provides a humane euthanasia.
- Third, the AAEP has taken a leadership role in working on and developing potential solutions for many of the unwanted horse problems.

I turn now to my first point – the way this bill is written will negatively impact the welfare of horses and it offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses. In addition, we feel strongly that, if passed, this bill will not stop the slaughter of horses.

Guided by a dedication to equine welfare, the AAEP is actively involved in the issues that surround the care of unwanted horses in the United States. The AAEP has evaluated H.R. 503, based on the legislation's ability to serve the health and welfare of the horse. The intent of this legislation is to ban the transportation and sale of horses for processing for human consumption and other purposes. The AAEP believes processing is symptomatic of a larger problem affecting the welfare of our nation's horses, and this problem is created by issues surrounding unwanted horses.

The Unwanted horse represents a group of horse's within the domestic equine population that are no longer wanted, needed or useful or their owners are no longer interested in them or capable of providing physical care or financial care.

While H.R. 503 and its supporters are well intentioned, the passage of this legislation, without adequate funding or an infrastructure in place to care for unwanted horses it will create a series of unintended consequences that negatively impact the health and welfare of the horse. Therefore, the AAEP and 84% of its membership, based on a 2002 membership survey, vigorously oppose this legislation as it is currently written.

The AAEP's chief concerns regarding H.R. 503 are:

1. Long-term placement of affected horses. How and where are we going to put these horses? The volunteers, alternative homes, rescue and retirement facilities are already stressed to the maximum. Simply put, there is not enough funding, volunteers or placement options for all of the unwanted horses across this country. Giving credit to the many volunteers and people involved with these sanctuaries and facilities, their good hearts are there, but unfortunately, their good hearts are not going to take care of these animals for 20 to 30 years, not to mention the financing needed to care for these horses. This simple fact is that should this bill be

enacted, the number of facilities will have to increase significantly in order to match the demand.

In addition, many of the individuals that adopt horses are not financially secure enough to adopt and provide proper care and feeding for a horse. While many of these people are well-intentioned individuals, the sad fact is that many of these horses are headed for a much worse fate of starvation, abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, many of the people that adopt horses have no idea of the cost to care for a horse.

It would be nice to absorb every unwanted horse into the equine society, but as the years go on, the sheer numbers of horses, and people with the great hearts will not be able to sustain this.

2. The Funding of care for unwanted horses. H.R. 503 does not address the funding required to care for or dispose of an additional 80,000 horses per year. Assuming an average cost of \$5 per day to provide a horse's basic needs, the funding needed per year, per horse is approximately \$1,825. This does not include veterinary and farrier care. Inadequate funding often creates inadequate care, which is a significant welfare concern for unwanted horses. Disposal alone can range from burial \$75.00 to cremation up to \$2,000.

3. Ambiguous language of the bill itself. H.R. 503 seeks to prohibit the shipping, transportation, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling or donation of horses and other equines to be processed, and for other purposes. “Other purposes” is not defined and, if taken literally, could mean the transportation of horses for any reason, including sporting events, sales, recreation or transportation for medical care. This language is detrimental to the equine industry as a whole and if not addressed, could have unintended consequences.

The AAEP, in addition to the Horse Welfare Coalition of 64 organizations represents millions of members, horse owners, farms and citizens, who believe that processing is a necessary option that needs to be available to the equine industry to prevent abuse and neglect to a certain population of horses.

My second point is that horse processing at a U.S.D.A. regulated facility provides humane euthanasia.

In July of 2002, several members of the AAEP leadership, including myself, visited the Beltex plant in Texas to see this process first-hand. A U.S.D.A. veterinarian was on-site to regulate the humane treatment of the animals throughout the process. During our visit, we witnessed a professionally run operation that treated horses with dignity throughout the process and euthanized them humanely.

Based on U.S.D.A. figures, more than 80,000 U.S. horses were processed in the U.S. in 2005, representing approximately 1 percent of the domestic equine population. The AAEP's position on processing is that horses destined for a processing facility should be:

- Treated humanely and with dignity;
- Transported according to guidelines approved by the U.S.D.A. in 2002 regarding the commercial transportation of equines to processing; and
- Euthanized in a humane manner in accordance with guidelines established by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

The AAEP believes that processing is not the ideal solution for addressing the large number of unwanted horses in the U.S. However, if a horse owner is unable or unwilling to provide humane care and no one is able to assume the responsibility, humane euthanasia by captive bolt at a U.S.D.A.-regulated facility is an acceptable alternative to a life of suffering, inadequate care or abandonment.

I ask the question, how many congressional members have ever seen a horse euthanized, and how many have seen a horse neglected and starved? The opponents of this legislation, animal health care providers, have seen both. We

have consciously decided the humane euthanasia alternative at the processing plants is infinitely preferable to seeing a horse starve to death.

Nobody likes or truly wants to see a horse euthanized, but when care is poor, horses suffer, owner neglect and abuse is evident, euthanasia at a processing plant is a humane option.

My final point has to do with the efforts that AAEP has taken a strong leadership role towards working on and developing potential solutions for many of the unwanted horse problems.

For more than fifty years, our association has been a renowned leader in promoting and fostering the welfare of horses. The AAEP and its members have spent numerous hours of their own time educating horse owners and the industry about the importance of caring for horses. Education takes a long time to show real change; however, we are confident that through our efforts, and the efforts of other equine organizations and through the assistance of congress, we can continue to decrease the number of horses heading to a slaughter facility. The AAEP is committed to educating its members and the public about the health and welfare of horses, and especially unwanted horses.

One of the many efforts that AAEP has worked on towards education includes the development and publishing in 2004 of a 32-page booklet titled the AAEP Care Guidelines for Equine Rescue and Retirement Facilities.

In April of 2005, the nation's first-ever Unwanted Horse Summit, an effort spearheaded by the AAEP, took place during the American Horse Council Annual Meeting. A total of 26 equine industry organizations, animal welfare groups and other stakeholders, including Representative Ed Whitfield from the first district of Kentucky, met for the purpose of examining the causes of unwanted horses and identifying approaches to dealing with this segment of the equine population. Following the Summit, a coalition was formed to continue the work until a more formal governance structure could be formed.

Over the last 18 months, the group developed a mission statement, began identifying long-term solutions for improving the quality of life for unwanted horses, and considered an operating plan that ultimately led to the suggestion that the American Horse Council provide a permanent administrative home for the group's work.

In June of this year, it was announced that the coalition was being folded into the American Horse Council to begin generating far reaching and practical solutions. The mission of the Coalition is to explore ways to reduce the number of horses that are unwanted each year and to improve their welfare through education and



the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety and responsible care of the horse. Owner education will be a focal point.

So, as you can see, this industry is coming together to address this industry problem. Our members are the front line every day helping horses and are committed to solving this problem.

In summary, the equine industry and you, our congressional leaders, must work together to address the root cause of the unwanted horse, not just the symptom of processing. We need proactive solutions and we believe that the AAEP, veterinarians across this country and the equine industry are developing solutions that will continue to help decrease the number of horses being processed. However, and most importantly, please remember that your vote on H.R. 503 is not a free vote. This bill, should it be enacted, will negatively impact the health and welfare of horses across the country and offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses.

The AAEP, a respected group of equine health care providers, are confident that if you vote no on H.R. 503, that when you go home and speak to your constituents, can feel secure in saying, "I voted no on H.R. 503 in order to protect horses from a life of increased abuse, neglect and abandonment. I am confident

that the equine industry is making great strides to help reduce the number of horses being processed and I supported them with my no vote on H.R. 503.”

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.